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PROPHECY
ON OLIVET.

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THE LORD'S PROPHECY
ON OLIVET

IN MATTHEW XXIV. XXV.

BY
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THE LORD'S PROPHECY ON OLIVET IN MATT. XXIV. XXV.

IN this discourse the Lord unfolds, first, the future of the Jewish disciples; secondly, that of the Christian profession; and thirdly, that of all the nations tested by the gospel of the Kingdom before the end comes, and He Himself reigns. Such are the simple divisions of the two chapters; and so it was or will be in fact. The discourse grew in His wisdom out of their directing His attention to the splendour of the buildings, from which their hearts were not yet weaned. They believed that Jesus was the Christ; they were born of God; but they had as yet their hearts associated with Israel's hopes; yea, even till the day that He ascended to heaven (Acts i. 6-11), though theirs was no small advance when He rose from the dead.

The Lord therefore begins with His disciples as they then were, who fittingly also represent those who are to succeed in the latter day, when the work of gathering out the Christian company for heavenly glory is complete, and God begins to prepare His people on earth for the reign of the returning Son of man. It is also the historic order. No other division of the subject matter could be so satisfactory. In this connexion were the disciples viewed not

only generally throughout the Gospel, but evidently when He sent forth the twelve in chap. x. "Depart not into a way of Gentiles, and into a city of Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather unto the lost sheep of Israel's house. And as ye go preach, saying, The kingdom of the heavens hath drawn nigh." That this was superseded by the Christian testimony, as we shall see still more markedly in the discourse on Olivet, is true; but it is plain from ver. 23 that this Jewish mission will go forth again before the end: "for verily I say to you, Ye shall not have finished the cities of Israel until the Son of man be come." Christianity is a parenthesis.

Again, in the chapter (xxiii) immediately preceding, the Lord says to the crowds and to His disciples, "The scribes and Pharisees sat in Moses' seat: all things therefore whatever they tell you, do and keep; but do not after their works, for they say and do not." The disciples clearly are here viewed, not as Christians, but as Jews; and this is confirmed by the pointed language of ver. 34 to the end of the chapter. For sad as the retribution must be, a change should come to the people before His return. "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate; for I say unto you, Ye shall in no wise see me henceforth until ye say, Blessed [be] he that cometh in Jehovah's name." Thus the repentance of a remnant will pave the way for His return; some suffering to death for His name, others preserved to welcome the Son of Man when He comes. Of both we hear much in the Psalms and the Prophets, as well as in the Revelation.

The first part of the discourse with its various sections suitably follows in chap. xxiv. 1-44.

"And Jesus went out, and was going forth from the temple, and his disciples came to [him] to show him the buildings of the temple. But he answered and said to them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say to you, Not a stone shall be in anywise left here on a stone, which shall not be thrown down" (1, 2). The rejected Messiah pronounces sentence: most solemn to hear for believing Jews who justly regarded the temple as the great external or public witness of the one true God and His worship on earth. It had been destroyed before, after reigning sons of David apostatised and made it the seat of Gentile idols. But had not there been a gracious return (not of Israel, it is true, but) of a Jewish remnant from Babylon to rebuild city and temple and to await Messiah? Alas! now, He whom they believed to be the anointed Son of David doomed it to another demolition which should not linger, when not the first but the last Gentile world-power should execute it; not because of idols, but because the Jews were first to refuse and then by Gentiles crucify their own Jehovah-Messiah: the two impeachments which Isaiah so long ago had predicted against the chosen people (xl.-xlviii. and xlix. -lvii.).

"And as he was sitting upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, Tell us when shall these things be? and what [is] the sign of thy coming, and of the completion of the age? And Jesus answering said to them, See that

no one mislead you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am the Christ, and they shall mislead many. And ye shall be about to hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled; for they must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines and pestilences and earthquakes in places. But all these [are the] beginning of travails. Then shall they give you up to tribulation and shall kill you; and ye shall be hated by all the nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be stumbled, and give up one another, and hate one another: and many false prophets shall arise, and shall mislead many. And because lawlessness shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall grow cool. But he that endured to [the] end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole habitable [earth] for a witness to all the nations, and then shall the end come" (vers. 3-14).

From Mark xiii. 3 we learn that Peter, James, John, and Andrew were those who thus enquired, When shall these things be? i.e. the temple's destruction; and what the sign of His coming and of the consummation of the age? In the Gospel of Luke we find the first of these questions fully answered, and the overthrow of the city involving that of the temple, and Jerusalem trodden down by Gentiles till their times be fulfilled, running on still since the sack of Titus, and very distinctly severed from the Son of Man's coming when the redemption of the godly Jews draws nigh. Here

the answer as to the impending ruin, already given in the parable of the marriage feast (Matt. xxii. 7) is passed by; and the Lord passes on to the second question, which rightly enough brings together the sign of His coming and of the completion of the age. Prophecy is not of insulated solution.

It is important to note the inexcusable error, in both the A. V. and the Revision, of confounding the end of "the age" with that of "the world." There is not a shadow of ground for it; for the coming age of a thousand years and more is after the age that still is, and before the eternal scene. Even disciples, as yet preoccupied with Jewish hopes and prejudices, and wholly unintelligent of the new and large and heavenly associations of Christianity, knew better. They did not say τοῦ κόσμου ("of the world") but τοῦ αἰῶνος ("of the age"); and the Lord in Matt. xiii. 38, 40 had amply guarded against such a confusion. The field or sowing-place was "the world"; the judgment on the darnel and the display of the wheat should be at the close of "the age." The new age will be characterised by the King reigning in righteousness, when the Father's kingdom is come on high, and the Son of Man's here below when His will is to be done on earth as in heaven.

The Lord gives first a general sketch of the ruin about to ensue. Moral amelioration, truth prevalent, peace for mankind, as yet were misleading dreams against which they should be on their guard. The rejection of Himself would open the door to many false claimants to lead astray many. Wars and their rumours should be heard. Only when He takes

His great power and reigns could it be otherwise, as Isaiah predicts. His disciples were not to be disturbed any more than deceived. Such evil things must be, as the King was rejected; and the end is not yet. For instead of learning war no more as when He comes in His kingdom, nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; nor this only but providential inflictions such as famines and pestilences and earthquakes in places. Yet all these are a beginning of birth-throes. At this time should His disciples be objects of persecution, betrayed, and even killed by all the Gentiles because of His name. Worse still, stumbling should befall many; and mutual treachery and hatred among themselves. Many false prophets should rise and mislead many; and because of the lawlessness that should abound the love of the many would wax cold. But he that endured to the end should be saved.

The Lord in these verses is contemplating souls with Jewish expectations, and tried by Jewish opposition and unbelief with the hatred of all the nations; but the one that endured is specially assured. The Deliverer will come in due time; but not a word about the church, nor yet the gospel in its depth. Yet "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the habitable earth for a testimony to all the nations, and then shall come the end." It is a testimony and not without fruit everywhere, without a word of effect farther. The change for dead and for living, for heaven and for earth, is reserved for Him Who is worthy, the rejected Christ at His coming.

Now the remarkable and evident fact is that the Lord has here before Him Jewish disciples in early days with their counterpart before the end, but without reference to the Christian light and privilege which would come in. So we have plain enough proof in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle of James, that in Jerusalem there was pertinacity in this respect that has often struck Christian readers as strange, not only after the great Pentecost was fulfilled, but to the eve of the subversion of the city and sanctuary. The Epistle to the Hebrews a little before gave God's final warning and proof, that for the Christian the Jewish system was now null and void. In this way one can apprehend how the Lord provides instruction for Jewish disciples before the end is come. Still thus far all is general; but from ver. 15 we are given much that is precise, He Himself referring to the last chapter of Daniel.

“When therefore ye shall see the abomination of desolation that was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in [the] holy place (let the reader understand), then let those in Judæa flee unto the mountains; let not him that is upon the house come down to take the things out of the house; and let not him that is in the field return back to take his cloak. But woe to those with child and to them that suckle in those days! But pray that your flight be not in winter nor on sabbath. For then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from world's beginning until now, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days had been cut short, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be

cut short. Then if any one say to you, Behold, here [is] the Christ, or there, believe [him] not; for there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall give great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you before. If therefore they say to you, Behold, [he is] in the desert, go not forth; Behold, [he is] in the inner chambers, believe not. For as the lightning cometh forth from the east and appeareth unto the west, so shall be the coming of the Son of man. Wherever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered. But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the land mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with great sound of trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from [one] end of heavens to the other" (vers. 15-31).

Here we learn the awful mark of Jewish wickedness in guilty and fatal alliance with the Gentiles, as Daniel warned. It needs the more attention; for this too had been done by the order of Antiochus Epiphanes long before Messiah's first advent. An idol was then set up in the holy place which brought desolation on all who acted or submitted, as it also drew out the uncompromising opposition of the Maccabees. This was predicted fully and plainly in

Dan. xi. 31, as the pious heroism that rejected the abomination follows. For this reason it is the more distinguishable from the future of like and even more portentous apostasy. For all has been accomplished up to ver. 35, where a blank is without doubt implied leading to the "time of the end," which we have here also in the Gospel. Then "the king" of the last time appears, not "of the north" as Antiochus Epiphanes had been in his day, still less "of the south," but demonstrably distinct from both. For at the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him; and the king of the north shall come against him (Dan. xi. 40). He is thus the object of hostility to both, and has for his sphere "the goodly land" between those two powers of the future on either side of him.

But he is also more widely the great religious enemy of Jehovah and His Christ; while, reigning over the land of Israel, he will set himself forth supremely in the temple of God. For this is the man of sin whom the apostle portrays in 2 Thess. ii., citing or applying Daniel's words. And to this future abomination of desolation the Lord refers in Dan. xii. 11, with which is connected a date of 1290 days, and a supplement of 45 more, before the blessed time comes which the then faith of Israel awaits. Then the prophet himself shall rest and stand in his lot; and better still the Son of man reign over, not Israel only, but all peoples, nations, and tongues: His dominion an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

This public act of apostasy the Lord makes the signal for immediate flight. That some ancients and moderns have interpreted it of Cestius Gallus or of Titus is familiarly known ; but either is really out of the question. For neither the one nor the other set up an idol in the holy place ; and as the one gave ample time to flee without the precipitancy here enjoined, so the other afforded none. For the city was surrounded and sacked ; and the victor (far from setting there an idol) sought in vain to spare the temple from the flames of utter ruin. The error arose from not seeing that the divine design was to present us with the Roman capture of Jerusalem and its results in Luke xxi. 20-24. But here the Lord passes these over in the corresponding place of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, and dwells only on the unequalled wickedness and tribulation of the future days, expressly said to be followed "immediately" by His own coming in clouds with great power and glory, closing man's evil age and opening the long-desired day of Jehovah. Luke omits that awful crisis.

As the sign for flight is unmistakable, so are those disciples contemplated by the Lord : "then let those in Judea flee unto the mountains." This in our future could not be for Christians, who, as we know from other scriptures, had been ere that translated to heaven. But God, on their disappearance, works in souls by His word and Spirit to have an earthly people also, but first and especially among the Jews, the mass of whom are then deceived by the Antichrist. The godly Jewish remnant are thus therefore in question ; and the Lord here points out

that their danger is so immediate that there is no space to come down from the house-top for going into the house and taking their property out: they must flee at once. If one is in the field on the other hand, let him not turn back even to secure his cloak. It touched the Lord to think of women at such a crisis impeded personally or by their babes. And He urges prayer that the flight might not be in the rigour of winter or to the dishonour of sabbath. Can any intelligent Christian fail to see how godly Jews are here in view? From "the holy place" in ver. 15 to "sabbath" in 20, all points to disciples in that form of relationship, at that future epoch, and in that limited area.

So is the tribulation that comes next (21, 22). "In the world ye have tribulation" applies to the Christian in principle: but no specific one is ever held out for him; he should expect it always. All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But the tribulation beyond parallel even for the Jews is during the last three-and-a-half years from the setting up of the abomination of desolation in the sanctuary. It is a judicial dealing of God through their enemies because of their audacious apostasy, and has no point of contact with the Christian, save that merely nominal Christians fully share it. The Gentiles as such play their part in it; so we read in Rev. vii. of "the great tribulation," out of which come a crowd of faithful ones who washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For the Jews and the Gentiles in the latter day will be thus visited in their respective measures, when the

Christians are no longer here but in heaven with Christ. But those days are cut short for the elect's sake: otherwise no flesh should be saved. For here the Lord speaks of Jewish disciples preserved on earth for His kingdom, not of Christians that endure suffering, and reign with Him when changed at His coming, which is not even supposed in this question.

Not less clear are the intimations in 23-26. They suppose Jewish dangers and deceits of the most trying kind, but not at all such as Christians are exposed to. For we know that when the Lord Jesus comes for us, we shall be changed, dead or living, and be caught up to meet Him in the air. This is so definitely revealed in the very first Epistle written to correct the mistake in the assembly of Thessalonians, just gathered unto the Lord's name, that it is hard to conceive a Christian that is not now apprised of it. Hence were any to tell him that the Christ was here or there, in Rome or in London, he would reject it, and treat the alleged as a false christ, and the herald as a false prophet; nor would great signs and prodigies weigh in support of so glaring a contradiction of the word of the Lord. But Jewish believers who have no such a promise did and will need the Lord's fore-warning to keep them from the snare. Whether therefore they say, He is in the desert or in the inner chambers, they were to believe neither. "For as the lightning cometh out of the east and appeareth unto the west, so shall be the coming of the Son of man." Not so does the apostle John put His coming to receive us to Himself, but as the Bridegroom

for the bride. Whereas the lightning flash appositely describes His judicial presence for the Jewish disciples beset with Jewish and Gentile enemies animated with Satanic rage and hatred. And this is fully confirmed by the figure attached: "wherever the carcase is, there shall be gathered the eagles," the swift instruments of divine vengeance on the dead prey which ought to have been a living witness for God. What a contrast with His coming and our gathering together unto Him! the blessed motive to deliver the deceived Thessalonians from being troubled by the false assertion that His day was actually there (as in 2 Thess. ii. 1, 2).

Then the Lord states that "immediately after the tribulation of those days" there should be a total subversion of governmental order above, the sun, the moon, the stars, "and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken," signs physically of the great change in progress for the earth. "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in the heavens." His appearing there on high is the sign of His coming to set up His kingdom and judge the quick. "And then shall all the tribes of the land" (for the context seems to favour this rendering, rather than "of the earth:" the word means either) lament: a result never expressed with His coming to translate us. "For they see Him coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." But He acts on and by more than men. He has His angels; and these "He shall send with a great sound of trumpet; and they shall gather His elect," meaning here those of Israel as well as of Judah who

are written in the book, "from one end of the heavens to the other." We may compare it with the many references in the Psalms and the Prophets, Isaiah especially.

To interpret scripture we need a power and wisdom above our own. We cannot understand by forcing the lock : the key is wanted, and grace gives it in Christ as taught by the word and Spirit of God. If you have Christ by faith, you have already the key. In faith apply Him to the Bible, and the Holy Spirit enables you to understand it. It is not a question of a superior mind or of great learning ;—for many learned men have been foolish enough in their mistakes. The simple saint who knows not beyond the mother-tongue may understand the Bible, if he with true simplicity submits himself to the Lord and has confidence in His love. This is produced by the Spirit of God : this, and only this, makes men humble, giving withal confidence in God and in His word, by taking away objects which darken, misdirect, or overpower his own mind.

Take the advice of a friend : read the scriptures prayerfully but believingly, and you will understand what is infinitely better than anything found in the various schemes of man. It is just the same as regards the interpretation of prophecy as in doctrine. No man should convince a Christian that one part of the word of God is sealed up and the other open. Once on a time it was so. When Daniel of old received those very communications to which the Lord directs the reader, he was told to seal up the book ; when John was called to have the same

communications and yet greater ones, he was told not to seal up the book. Perhaps you have seen the difference, and the reason of it. The principle lay here: Jewish saints could not enter into the true and full meaning of the future till Christ came, at least until the end arrives. For then indeed, when the last days of this age are here, the godly remnant will understand. The wicked shall not understand. You cannot separate moral condition from real intelligence of God's word. But the Christian already has, not Christ only, but the Spirit in virtue of redemption; and hence he is called and qualified to search all things, yea the deep things of God. They are now, including the things to come, revealed fully and finally.

When the grace of God gives faith and the desire to do the will of God, then souls become able to understand both doctrine and prophecy. They learn that all the revealed mind of God centres in Christ, not in the first man. When you are not bent on finding in prophecy England or America, the cholera, the potato disease, or your own time; when you are delivered by grace from all such prepossessions, then with Him as the object of the soul you have a fit moral condition; because such absorbing ideas of men no longer govern and blind you. Hence the only way to understand any part of the Bible is just by grace to give up for Christ our own will and prejudices; thus we can face anything. We are no longer afraid of what God has to reveal; nor do we try to read anything of our own into the Bible, being then content to gather God's meaning from it.

May this be truly the temper and endeavour of our souls now.

Has it not been clearly shown that thus far the Lord Jesus speaks of disciples connected with the temple, and Judæa, and Jerusalem, but not of Christians? Take these further proofs of it. He says, "And pray that your flight be not in winter nor on a sabbath day." The Lord's day is our day, the first day of the week. The Jew rightly and properly kept Jehovah's sabbaths. As to this, there are languages in Europe more correct than what we hear more commonly spoken around us. The Pope's tongue, the Italian, keeps up the right distinction; it always speaks of Saturday as the sabbath day, and Sunday as the Lord's day. How curious that it should be so, where such gross darkness reigns on almost everything else!

In our own land and for a long time has been a great deal of confusion as to the sabbath and the Lord's day. Let none be offended at the remark; for its truth is certain and of importance. The Lord's day differs from the sabbath, not by a lower but by a higher degree of sanctity, not by leaving Christians free to do their own will on other days, but by calling them to do the Lord's will on that day in a complete separation to His glory, the holy services of divine honour in works of faith and labours of love. In short, the Lord's day differs essentially from the sabbath in that it is the day of grace, not of law, and the day of new creation, not of the old. The consequence of seeing this will be very important differences indeed in heart and practice.

Suppose a Christian had the strength to walk 20 miles on the Lord's day, and to preach the gospel six or seven times, would he be guilty of transgressing God's will? It is to be hoped that not a single person perhaps in this place would venture to think so; yet if really under the sabbath law, what can absolve from the obligations of that day? All under the law are bound within defined limits. Are Jews free to use the sabbath in indefinite labour even for what you know to be the active purposes of goodness? We must obey in our relationship.

Granted that the Son of man is Lord of the sabbath; but are the Jewish disciples also lords of the sabbath? You cannot do freely what you count ever so good: Jews are under stringent regulations as to that day. If the sabbath were your day, you are required to keep it as such. As you, a Christian, have to do with the Lord's day, seek to understand its meaning, and be true to it. Without question the Lord's day is a day of consecration to the worship and to the work of the Lord. It is not the last day of a laborious week, a day of rest that you share with your ox or your ass. It is a day that is devoted to the Lord Jesus, especially to communion with His own in the world. Nor is there sin in the most strenuous labour for souls then; on the contrary such labour in the Lord is good and blessed wherever it is found, if He guide in it (and we need this).

But the Jewish disciples contemplated here are told to pray that the time for their precipitate flight should not be in the winter nor on a sabbath-day;

for the one would from its inclemency seriously impede, and on the other they could not go farther than a sabbath-day's journey. But how could this affect us as Christians? Even if once Jews, we are no longer under such restrictions. The Lord is speaking not of a Christian but of future Jewish disciples, subject to the law and its ritual, and animated by Jewish hopes.

Further, it is said, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not even from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would be saved." All this is plain enough. It is not a question of heavenly things but of His Kingdom. They sought to live here and be the subjects of the blessed reign and glory when the Lord comes. It is glory on earth, not in heaven. "But for the elect's sake those days should be shortened."

"Then, if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is the Christ, or there, believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, so as if possible to mislead even the elect. Behold, I have told you beforehand. Therefore, if they say to you, Behold, [he is] in the desert, go not forth: Behold, [he is] in the inner chambers, believe [it] not." It is clear and certain that the elect here are Jewish. Improbable for a Christian to be deceived by such rumours for an instant. But it is the fact that the Lord Jesus supposes considerable danger for such disciples as are here. In fact, being Jewish (not Christian), they might be deceived by the cry

that He was here or there on earth; whereas no Christian could be in danger, who awaits the Son of God from heaven. Yet the Jewish disciples were exposed to it. For looking as they were for the Lord's coming to the earth, they knew that the Lord's feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives. They might thus be taken in by deceits. Not so the Christian. He knows that he is to be with the Lord in the heavens, being for this taken up out of this world into the air to meet the Lord on high. But the deceits in question are addressed to such only as expect to meet the Lord on the earth. The whole of the scene thus far consists of the Lord's instructions to disciples connected with Jerusalem and Judæa, and has nothing at all to do with the Christians looking to join the Lord above.

Here again is the reason why even Jewish disciples should not listen. "For as the lightning cometh forth from the east and is seen even unto the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be." Commentators have applied all this to the Roman conquest. But the army of Titus did not come out of the east, as the lightning is said to do here, nor did it shine unto the west: the very reverse would be a more apt figure, had the Romans been meant. So distinctly has the Lord Jesus guarded against the misinterpretations of men. The Son of man's coming will be quite different and surprise all like the lightning. It will be no question of going hither and thither to seek Him.

The Lord then has given these firm standing points, these landmarks as it were, in the prophecy,

which hinder us from being carried away by every wind of theory. We may see clearly what the Spirit has set before us. Nor has there been knowingly passed over anything material, nor any violence done to a word. No wish is there to give aught but a clear, distinct, and positive impression of the mind of the Lord as conveyed in His own words. The disciples furnish occasion for others in the main like themselves in Judæa at the close of the age.

Then it is said, "Wheresoever the carcase is, there will be gathered together the eagles" (ver. 28). Apply this to the church or to the Christian, and what can you make of it? Is the church "the carcase"? We have heard something still more dreadful. Men have not been wanting who say that the Lord is! Such are the results of attempting to interpret the prophecy on false ground. From early days Greek and Latin Fathers taught these strange and even profane ideas; and many down to modern time have followed in their wake. These crudities ought surely to be judged irreverent as well as grossly mistaken. Can any intelligent Christian deny it to be a rash and unworthy interpretation, no matter how (according to this scheme) they take "the carcase," whether applying it to the church or to the Lord? The church united to Christ by the Holy Spirit is His body ($\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$): it is a wondrous privilege and a blessed truth; but is the church a carcase ($\pi\tau\omega\mu\alpha$)? Surely not; it is His living body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. Nor is the Lord regarded as a body dead or merely alive,

but as the risen and glorified Head. The Lord a carcase! What were, or are, they dreaming about?

The whole effort is on false ground. There is no getting a consistent meaning out of the passage when interpreted of the church. The moment you refer it to the Jewish people, it becomes strikingly true. For the mass of the Jews will then be apostate; and the eagles or vultures who flock thither are figures of the divine judgments executed on the guilty people* by the hostile nations of the earth. Whatever may be the instruments, they are judgments of God executed at this time. If the Christians were the carcase, they must be the object of the judgment, for there the eagles, figures of those that execute judgment, are gathered together. But this is not at all the relation of the Lord's coming to the Christian. Nor can any Christians be the eagles or instruments of divine vengeance, any more than the carcase, without abandoning all the truth and character of their calling. The changed saints undoubtedly will go up to meet the Lord; but is He then to be the carcase, and are the church the eagles? In such a scheme, there is only the choice of one evil less or greater than another; and it is generally so with an erroneous interpretation. Apply it to the object the Lord had in view, and harshness disappears. This is the test of scriptural

* We see here an instance of the importance of rightly dividing the word; for Dean Alford through neglect of this lays down that the final fulfilment is "*over the whole world*, for that is the *πρῶμα* now." This is to confound the Jewish part with Christendom and the Gentiles, given later and separately in the discourse. In each case too the respective judgment is of a different character, and of course differently applied and described.

truth: whenever men press a false interpretation, the general testimony of scripture is confused and dislocated or contradicted thereby.

Then the Lord adds, "But immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give its light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken" (ver. 29).

Here it is that the popular view advocated by Dean Alford and others places the Lord's beginning to speak of His return personally. This however is not only to destroy the force of "Immediately after the tribulation of those days" with which the verse opens, but it breaks the connexion with the true transition to the last days in ver. 15, which introduces precise details of that epoch in their order; and it would seem, synchronising with the preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom in all the habitable earth as a witness to all the nations in the general history, "and then shall the end come." Thenceforward it is, what happens in the temple, Judæa, and strictly Jewish concerns at the end of the age. This is shown clearly by the reference to Dan. xii. 11. For the prophet there tells us that "from the time that the continual [holocaust] shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolation set up, [there shall be] a thousand, two hundred, and ninety days," with a supplement in ver. 12 of "forty-five days" more to complete the incoming of the blessed time. Now count as men like from the siege of Titus, 1335 years for days bring in nothing of the sort.

The starting-point is wrong, and all modes of rectification are vain. It is really the last future crisis in and round Jerusalem, though it seems the gospel of the Kingdom goes on by godly Jews outside over the earth about the same time, the days in the prophet being literal days as here in ver. 22. What has misled most is confounding the very different language and truth in Matt. xxiv. 15 etc. and Mark. xiii. 14 etc. (who both give us what is entirely future) with that of Luke xxi. 20-24, which is entirely past, save the treading down of Jerusalem by Gentiles while Gentile times last, &c. Here it is unequivocally and exclusively the Roman sack and its consequences to this day; while Luke's future reference commences with ver. 25 and onward. It is an error to mix up this Roman episode in the third Gospel with the pointedly different description in the first and second Gospels which omit this, and then converge on the future only. They speak of the abomination of desolation, and of the unequalled tribulation, on which Luke is silent. But Luke tells of the Romans investing Jerusalem, and that desolation, of which Matthew and Mark say not a word; as he does not about the tribulation without parallel, but only of "days of vengeance, and great distress upon the land and wrath to this people." The other Evangelists are wholly silent on the extreme slaughter by the Roman arms, and their captivity into all the nations; with the notable prolonged fact that Jerusalem should be trodden down by Gentiles till their times are over, as they are not yet. All this is as carefully presented by Luke in exact consistency

with the Spirit's design in his Gospel, as the other two omit it, being devoted to the unprecedented horrors of the future which Luke omits.

But all three take up the closing scene, Luke not saying "Immediately after the tribulation etc.," as in fact he had not alluded to it in the least, but joining the other two about signs in sun, moon, and stars, though as usual noticing moral state beyond the others. Next all speak of the Son of man coming, as he puts it in a cloud with power and great glory; and he alone adds, "But when these things begin to come to pass, look up and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh." Can any Christian be so prejudiced as not to see that the heavenly saints are not here in view? For we already have in Him redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our offences; whereas those here represented have yet to enjoy it in His Kingdom.

Luke's presentation is of the more value as settling the true force of "this generation shall in no wise pass till all things have taken place" among them, the end of Gentile supremacy over Israel and Jerusalem. The desire to limit "this generation," as here employed, to the destruction of their city by the Romans, is thus certainly precluded. Further, at the consummation of the age the revived Roman Empire will not be against the apostate Jews, but rather on the side of the Antichrist or wilful king of Palestine, when the king of the north at the time of the end shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots and with horsemen and

with many ships. But each shall perish successively and horribly under the Lord of lords and King of kings. The future (and these verses beyond just question strikingly speak of the future) still more conclusively proves, for any acquainted with the prophets, the impossibility of interpreting the eagles of the Roman armies in the past, or the still more childish fancy of their symbolising the church or Christians in the future, with the result (yet more offensive involved) of the carcass figuring the Lord of glory.

“And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall the tribes of the earth mourn (ver. 30).” The Son of Man appearing in heaven is, I presume, the sign of His coming to enforce His claim on earth. It is not here the believers with joy going up to meet the Lord, but the tribes of the earth, or at least of the land, mourning when the sign appears. “And they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (ver. 31).” Here too light is given of all moment to decide that the coming of the Son of man is in view of the land, Israel (or at least the chosen), and not at all to receive the heavenly ones for association with Himself in the Father’s house.

For beyond controversy He is seen coming on the clouds of heaven before He sends forth His angels to gather together His elect, here in question,

from the four winds. Now it is a matter of positive revelation by the apostle Paul (Col. iii. 4) that "When Christ, our (or, your) life shall be manifested then (*τότε*, not *εἴτα*) shall ye also be manifested with Him in glory." It is not the moment when we are changed and caught up to meet Him in the air, but are with Him manifested in glory. The heavenly saints are already with Him when He comes judicially as Son of man; for this is His given office as such (John v. 27), to execute judgment. They are with Him already, not then translated, called and chosen and faithful, and therefore not angels (who are not "called" nor said to be "faithful") but saints (Rev. xvii. 14).

Indeed we learn from Rev. xix. 14 that the armies that are in the heaven followed Him upon white horses clothed in white pure byss, the righteousnesses of saints as interpreted just before; whereas angelic clothing had been said to be pure bright linen (Rev. xv. 6). The elders, who represent the saints as chiefs of the royal priesthood, are seen on high from Rev. iv. to xix. Here they first appear in the quality of bride for the marriage of the Lamb above, and next accompany Him as armies when He issues from heaven to judge and war in righteousness. Hence it is in the teeth of scripture that *we* can be on the earth and see Him appear as the glorious Son of Man in heaven coming to judge the quick. On the contrary we shall be then manifested together with Him when He is manifested in glory.

The Lord had already intimated it before Paul wrote 1 and 2 Thess., 1 Cor. xv. and Col. iii. Only,

though spoken, it was long after Paul had departed to be with Christ that John xiv. was written, and still longer than Rev. iv-xix. These scriptures reveal that Christ will surely come to change and translate above the heavenly saints; as Enoch (Jude 14) and Zechariah (xiv. 5) say they come with Him: a truth repeated by the apostle in 1 Thess. iii. 13, iv. 14. Then in vers. 15-17 he proceeds in a new revelation to explain that this will be by His coming for them by His descent from heaven with a shout of command which gathers them in a moment to Himself. Clearly then "the elect," subsequently gathered after the Lord appears, are not heavenly, but rather His restored people, the nucleus of godly Israel, in harmony with the context.

Too many lay great stress upon gathering "His elect." Be not too quick, my friends. The "elect" may not necessarily mean Christians. If one speak of elect now, it is so; but had God no heavenly "elect" before there were Christians? And after these are taken to heaven, will there be no elect on earth? Was the Lord to make a solitude and call it peace? Was God precluded from mercy on earth, because His sovereign grace had given us and the O. T. saints our respective places in heaven? There were elect Gentiles in patriarchal days and later too. Take Job for one, and his friends no doubt also the same; were they not elect men? Melchisedek, Jethro, and others; were not they elect? Need one enumerate the elect of Israel in the past? We find clearly elect Gentiles as well as Jews and Christians. When we read of Christianity, then the

elect must be so explained; if we read about a Jewish state, then the phrase applies to a Jewish election; and so with the nations too. We must be governed by the context. As the Lord here is simply speaking about Israel, the sense should not be ambiguous. When we have "his elect" named, He means the elect of those described, that is, of Israel. This is not at all to bring in arbitrary rules. Is it not in fact a very plain and necessary principle of exposition?

The Lord in all the context is speaking about Israel and their hopes. Consequently "his elect" must be interpreted according to the object in view. These elect ones are to be gathered "from one end of heaven to the other," yet not for heaven but on earth. (Compare Isaiah xxvii., lxv., Rom. xi. 5, 7, 28.)

"Now learn the parable from the fig-tree." The fig-tree is a well known symbol of Israel as a nation. This confirms what has been already said. In the Gospel of Luke, where the Lord takes a view of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews, He employs this very symbol, but enlarged remarkably. He says "the fig tree, and all the trees." The latter are not spoken of in Matthew, because this part only looks at the Jew; but in Luke referring to the Gentile as well as the Jew, He hence adds, "and all the trees." (Compare Luke xxi. 29.)

"Now learn the parable from the fig-tree. When its branch is now become tender, and putteth forth its leaves, ye know that the summer is nigh; even so ye also, when ye see all these things, know that it (or, he) is near, at the doors. Verily I say to

you, This generation shall not pass away till all these things have come to pass " (vers. 32-34). Mark the phrase "all these things," from the first troubles down to the last, and the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Clearly here "this generation" cannot mean, what some impute to it, a mere period of thirty years, or a man's life. The phrase signifies, what it frequently does in scripture, a line characterised by certain moral tokens entirely independent of a brief limit of time. Hence we find, in the Psalms very particularly, this use of "generation." One text is enough to prove it in the most convincing manner. In Psalm xii. 7 we read "Thou shalt keep them, O Jehovah, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever." "This generation" is supposed to go on, and it is an evil generation, a generation which has no faith, a stubborn and Christ-rejecting generation. "This generation," or the non-believing race of the Jews, is not to pass away till all these things have taken place. Thus the same generation which crucified the Lord of glory is going on still, and will, till He comes again in the clouds of heaven.

Some of you probably have read in a respectable Review an article of no small notoriety; which boasts that the Jews of the present day are really what they were in the days of our Saviour—a noble-hearted generous race (though they made that mistake!) as compared with their rude forefathers in the days of Moses, &c. Alas for the judgment of man! What a confession that "this generation" has not passed away! They *are* still the same

proud, self-righteous, Christ-rejecting race as they were then.

But the grace of God will make them anew, "a generation to come." The Lord will judge the unbelievers at last, dealing with them righteously after His immense long-suffering, but delivering a godly remnant in His grace. The Messiah has great things in store for Israel. There will be this double action indeed, that the mass of them will fill up the cup of iniquity which their fathers began; whilst the remnant will become the holy seed, the Israel of the millennial day. Of the former He speaks when saying that "this generation shall not pass away till all these things have come to pass. "The heaven and the earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. Of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of the heavens, but the Father only" (vers. 35, 36).

The next comparison (vers. 37-41) is not to the fig-tree or anything else taken from the physical world. A figure is taken from the dealings of God in the Old Testament. "But as the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of Man; for as in those days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they knew not until the flood came and took them all away, so shall the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women [shall be] grinding at the mill, one is taken and one is left." Had heavenly saints been in question, Enoch would be the

appropriate type ; but as the Lord meant saints, not caught up, but carried through the waters of judgment, He justly chose Noah as the pattern for the remnant to be on the earth.

Again, instead of such an indiscriminate slaughter or such a captivity as the Jews had executed upon them by the Romans, there is a direct and plain contrast. Here is unfailing discrimination : one man taken and one left ; one woman taken and another left. The Lord will deal with perfect discernment in each case : not so did the Romans, nor any army that ever took a city. Notoriously if not necessarily at such a time, there is scarce thought of, or leisure for, discrimination. The rule is wholesale bloodshed, and often slavery. It was especially so when Titus sacked the city. So alas ! it may be to this day. But when the Lord Jesus comes in judgment of the quick, it will be quite otherwise. One, whether of men or of women, is taken for judgment, one left for blessing in the land.

The Lord winds up this part of His prophecy by saying, " Watch therefore, for ye know not on what day your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the house-master had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be digged through. Therefore, be ye also ready, for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh " (vers. 42-44). There closes the portion of the prophecy which refers to the Jews. It began by referring to the Jewish remnant, because such the disciples as yet were really, though believers. Christ took them up

just as they were; though we know they subsequently became Christians. They then passed into a new relationship. Faith in Him they had already; but, instead of His reigning and blessing them on the earth, another order of things was founded in connexion with His ascension to heaven. Hence the same disciples merged into a new form of relationship with God, of which the Holy Spirit sent forth was the power. They were taught no longer to expect the Lord's restoration of the kingdom as their proper hope, but, contrariwise, that the Lord would come to receive them to Himself, and take them to the Father's home in heaven. This is the Christian's hope; this is what they await. The Lord calls them out from everything on earth to Himself. They had been expecting the Lord to establish them on the earth up to the day when the Lord Jesus went up to send down the Holy Ghost.

Christianity thus comes in, as if a drawbridge had been opened and let them into an entirely new circle. The disciples at the beginning were on one side of the bridge, the disciples at the end would be on the other side. The drawbridge opens, and the new thing, the church, passes through. It is the calling of Christians out of the world, of those called in one body, waiting till Christ comes to receive them to Himself and take them where He is. The Lord Jesus, having accomplished redemption, has Himself first taken His seat in heaven. Thus the disciples become heavenly (1 Cor. xv. 48) and are being transformed spiritually (2 Cor. iii. 18). Finally, at His coming, the Lord Jesus will take

them completely out of their natural environment, conformed in body to His own glorious body. The state of things on earth since redemption, till He come to take us to be with Him on high, is then well enough called Christianity.

It is not denied that the saints of old, before Christianity came in, will share in the resurrection, when they too will shine in the likeness of Christ: Only there is an enormous difference meanwhile. We are brought, since His cross, into salvation, with new relationships in union with Himself. Then the Holy Spirit gives a fresh and incomparably greater power to those who are now gathered to His name. It is possible that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were more faithful than many, perhaps than most of us. For ourselves we cannot take high ground; but we boast in God and of what Christ has given us. He it is really brings in "grace and truth," which makes our unfaithfulness more manifest; for the greater the Christian privileges, the more strictly is our unfaithfulness measured. But the hope does not make us ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us.

Very striking is the fact that "the Son of man" is here dropt, only to be resumed in the third section where all the nations come into review. For it will be shown that the clause containing that title in the Christian portion (xxv. 13) is spurious. So in Dan. vii. we see this title used when He comes to deal with the Gentile powers (the last in particular), to the deliverance of the Jewish people, and His universal dominion over all peoples and tongues.

It has to do with His presence for the earth, but does not rise to His heavenly glory nor to our association with Him there. Hence the need of the intermediate part of the great discourse, in which the Lord communicated as much as those addressed could then bear, leaving it to the Holy Spirit when sent from heaven to lead into all the truth. It is here that failure in faith and hope is found even among unquestionable saints, especially when they lean on that frail reed, human tradition, against which the Lord directed the keenest arrow.

THE CHRISTIAN PROFESSION.

MATT. XXIV. 45—XXV. 50.



FROM this point the Lord begins to open out a new thing, namely, what the disciples were going to enter. Evidently this was the proper order. The Lord had begun with them as they were, and then He leads on to what they were soon to become, with the new relationships to Christ dead and risen, when fresh power would be given by the Holy Spirit. As a mark of this, you will see that the Lord drops all allusion to Judæa, and any reference to the temple, the prophets, and the sabbath. The Lord widens out now into parables of a general and comprehensive nature, which would be equally as true at Timbuctoo as at Jerusalem—it does not matter where. They bear upon Christianity. What Christ died and rose to establish by the mission of the Spirit is not one of the narrow systems of men, nor of their broad worldly associations. Christianity is exclusive of nothing but sin; it is the practical expression of Christ, not only in grace and truth but in resulting practice. The Lord definitely marks this opening out into wider principles of a moral nature, which embrace all Christian disciples, wherever they might be in this world, and at any time

till He comes. Hence we find three parables which apply thereto characteristically.

The first parable is the prudent servant contrasted with the evil one. It is a question of faithful service in the house, the duty of the highest and the duty of the lowest, not of the excellent activity with variety of spiritual endowment in each for trading with his lord's goods as given in the parable of the Talents (chap. xxv). The form is very striking. We have, seen as one, a profession carried out and ending very differently ; and this in relation with the Lord, not with Israel as before. " Who then is the faithful and prudent bondman whom his lord set over his household, to give them their food in due season ? Blessed [is] that bondman whom his lord on coming shall find so doing. Verily I say to you, that he will set him over all that he hath. But if that evil bondman shall say in his heart, My lord tarrieth ; and shall begin to beat his fellow-bondmen, and shall eat and drink with the drunken, the lord of that bondman shall come in a day when he expecteth not, and in an hour that he knoweth not, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites : there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth " (vers. 45-51).

It was another case with the nation. In Judaism there was an enormous unbelieving mass in former times falling into idolatry and all kinds of wickedness, and hence persecuting the faithful brethren. But one of the characteristic marks of Christendom is that all are professors of Christ, whether truly or falsely ; and it is therefore presented here as one

whole strikingly. The Lord in the parable says the faithful and prudent servant shall be made ruler over all His goods. Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he comes shall find so doing. It is the responsibility of all in the house. Hence He goes on to say, "But if that evil servant" etc. They are surprisingly joined thus. On what does his ruin turn? "In his heart" the evil servant says, "My lord delayeth." His coming is not a mere idea: man likes to have his notions; and nobody is the better for them. But this refers to what is deep and real, the heart's indifference to the coming of the Master. The evil servant says in his heart, "My lord delayeth." He believes what he likes; and what he likes is that the Lord should delay His coming.

Most affecting it is to see that the Lord treats the heart's putting off His return as leading to assumption within and laxity without. That evil servant, when he says in his heart (for so it is), My lord delayeth, shall begin also to beat his fellow-servants, and shall eat and drink with the drunken. What a contrast with Christ, and a practical denial of Him! It led back the professor to the world in self-exalting oppression, and in allowed intimacy with the ungodly and immoral. He is therefore appointed, when the Lord is come, to have his part with the hypocrites. The Lord does not treat him as a Jew or a Greek, but according to his responsibility.

How different it is with the faithful and prudent servant! He waits and longs for the Lord because he loves Him who first loved us. Hence the hope

of Christ is quite distinct from prophecy. One might be greatly versed in the prophetic word, and wholly lack that hope; one might have the heart filled with the hope, and be altogether unacquainted with prophecy. No one could rightly deprecate those solemn warnings of what will burst unexpectedly on the world. But, next to believing in Christ for life and redemption, with worship and service and walk following, the Christian needs and is called to wait for the Son of God from heaven. Now if you love anyone, you delight to see him. The absence of the person beloved is trying to you. There may be the wisest reasons for delay, but the delay taxes your patience; and the hope of the speedy return of the one you love is the greatest joy to the heart.

The Lord gives this feeling, and strengthens it, toward Himself. It is the proper hope of the Christian, not the kingdom but Christ. Grant that it may be hindered by the influence of prophetic notions; yet there is in the heart of all true Christians a genuine desire for the coming of Christ. But when the soul is not in peace through a full gospel, one is afraid. Those who give them an uncertain gospel are responsible for it; as they thus keep souls in dread, they do the greatest injury to the grace of God. One does not speak of such as quite falsify Christ or His work, but of those who do preach it partially, who fear to set forth the full value of the sacrifice of Christ; in the perfect deliverance which His death and resurrection have wrought for the believer. The result of this defect in teaching is that Chris-

tians are apt to be alarmed instead of rejoicing at the immediate hope of Christ's coming.

They do not own that the acceptance of Christ is the acceptance of a Christian ; they have not learnt the truth that the Lord by His death has not only effaced their sins but had their sinful nature condemned completely ; and this, in order to their walking now in the Spirit, to be followed by a perfect conformity to Christ's image in resurrection at His coming (Rom. viii. 1-4, 11, 29).

Who can exaggerate what Christ has wrought for the believer ? If you rest on His redemption, all difficulties Godward are taken away. Then there is nothing left but the need of daily self-judgment for every inconsistency, the duty of serving Him now, and the delight of being with Him and seeing Him then, as also of worshipping both now and for ever by grace. He has done all for each to bring us to God, taking us out of every evil. How can the believer not rejoice in this and in Him ? Therefore all Christians, wherever or whoever they may be, are entitled to have joy and delight, though for many dimmed unhappily, in the prospect of His coming.

Notwithstanding all their imperfect notions, it is certain that all Christians love Christ here, and in principle await Him too. To say this may not please some zealous pre-millennialist friends ; but surely this hope belongs to every Christian heart. Would you doubt it of S. Rutherford ? or of the late S. Waldegrave ? Yet the system of the latter in his Modern Millennarianism was wildly unscriptural. For he believed the First Resurrection reign over,

and that we are now in the little space, before Christ sits on the great white throne; and this he made His coming, when heaven and earth shall have fled!

There are false prophetic views which hinder; but as the new nature goes out toward Christ, so it longs for the time when we shall be for ever with the Lord. Waiting for Christ supposes waiting for His coming; but if put into precise forms and logical propositions, damage may easily ensue. If the object be to prove that many Christians do not look for Christ's coming, abundant grounds appear for working on. But if, on the other hand, you are child-like, God gives sufficient evidence that those who are Christ's, notwithstanding obstacles, do look and at bottom long for His coming.

Only let the children of God get clear of those clouds of noxious and unwholesome vapours that constantly rise up between the Lord and them. Let them cherish in their souls the hope He gave them. If you bring in a millennium first, it is hard to see Christ's coming clearly; it must act as a veil, which dulls the hope of that day. It may not destroy the hope; yet one cannot but look for His coming in an imperfect manner. If you bring in a great tribulation first, this also lowers the outlook and enfeebles the hope greatly; it occupies one with evils as they rise, produces a depressing effect, and fills the heart with that judicial trouble and its shade of desolation. They are the mistakes of theorists. The one puts a wrong expectation between you and the coming of the Lord, kindling meanwhile

a dreamy excitement in waiting for that day. The other case produces a sort of spiritual nightmare, an oppressive feeling in the thought that the church must go through so dreadful a crisis.

Be assured, my brethren, that the scriptures deliver us from both the dream and the nightmare. They entitle the believer to wait for Christ as simply as a child, being perfectly certain that God's word is as true as our hope is blessed. There is to be God's glorious kingdom; but the Lord Jesus will bring it in at His coming. Without doubt the great tribulation shall come, but not for the Christian. When it is a question about the Jew, you can understand it well: for why does the greatest tribulation come upon him? Because of idolatry; yea, of the Beast and the Antichrist worshipped. It is for him a moral retribution, with which the Christian has nothing directly to do. The predicted trouble falls on the apostate nations and the Jews. Those that ought to be witnesses of Jehovah and His Christ will at last fall into the dreadful snare of allowing the abomination to be put into the sanctuary of God.

What connection is there between this and the Christian looking for Christ? Here the prophecy of the blessed Lord drops all allusion to anything peculiar to Israel. His coming will surely be for the solemn judgment of all who pervert grace and indulge in unrighteousness, receiving a sentence so much the more stern, because the gospel reveals God perfectly in light and love, which they abuse to fleshly licence. As to this the Fathers taught falsehood and unholiness. But scripture teaches

the Christian not only to wait for Christ as his proper and dearest hope, but also for His appearing and kingdom when wrong will be redressed and righteousness rewarded and evil too put down for ever to His honour and glory. Yes, we love His appearing and His kingdom when the proud shall be abased, the meek inherit the earth, Satan be set aside, and the Lord exalted publicly without a rival or a foe. It is a blessed hope; but we have the still better and higher of being with Him where He is, that we may behold His glory, which the Father gave Him because He loved Him before the world's foundation.

Then comes the parable of the ten Virgins. It is essential to disengage the Christian from the thought that the early part of this discourse is about him: such an idea completely perverts his judgment. For it presents, as we have seen, the Jewish people distinctively. Here we have a then future comparison of the kingdom of the heavens.

"Then shall the kingdom of the heavens be likened to ten virgins, the which took their torches and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. For the foolish took their torches and took no oil with them; but the prudent took oil in their vessels with their torches. Now, the bridegroom tarrying, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight a cry was made, Behold, the bridegroom! go ye forth to meet him. Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their torches. And the foolish said to

the prudent, Give us of your oil ; for our torches are going out. But the prudent answered, saying, Peradventure there be not enough for us and you. Go rather to those that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came ; and those ready went in with him to the marriage-feast ; and the door was shut. Afterward came also the rest of the virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answering, said, Verily I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour " (Matt. xxv. 1-13).

Now we have also in our day to do with another and opposite error, an error that takes away the parable of the virgins from properly applying to the Christian. We may affirm, on the contrary, that it has nothing to do with the Jewish remnant directly ; who, as they are not called to go out to meet the Bridegroom, could not have oil in their vessels, and lastly will not be exposed to the temptation of going to sleep. The Jews ought to abide where they are, or only flee to escape death in their refusal of idolatry. And those who survive, for the Lord's appearing and their own deliverance, only receive the Holy Spirit after He appears. All is in contrast with the Christian position. But many a one who had been a Jewish disciple became a Christian, in the true sense of the term, as Peter uses the word in his First Epistle, and Luke in the Acts. In this parable, then, the Lord shows the kingdom of heaven will be likened to ten virgins. They all went forth to bear their testimony to Christ as the torch was to give light. They were to shine as lights in the world. Each virgin tak-

ing her lamp, they went forth to meet the Bridegroom.

Now this is characteristic of the Christian. The Israelite did not separate from the world of which he was head. The Christian goes forth to meet Christ, who is gone to heaven. If he had been a Jew, he leaves his ancient associations and hopes behind. Again, if the greatest grandee in the Gentile world, or if of the poorest condition, he alike abandons his old obscurity or his old grandeur. He willingly forgets all that is of the world. He is called out of every snare which can arrest or fascinate the heart of man. He has got a new and all-absorbing object in Christ; and Christ in heavenly joy and blessedness. It is not the Judge coming to deal with the wicked. If the Christian goes forth to meet the Bridegroom, does such a parable fitly bring an image of terror? Well he knows that the same Jesus who is the Bridegroom will be the Judge; he knows well that Jesus will put down all those who oppose Him; but He is not the Judge and the Bridegroom to the same persons, any more than both will be at the same precise time. Where would be the sense of such confusion? The Lord purposely brings in the bright figure of the Bridegroom to Christians who are waiting for Him.

But there are other elements of moment. Here are persons true or false. They are not presented as one object: consequently the idea of the bride*

* It is a strange fact, however, that two uncial MSS. (DX), eight cursives, several ancient versions, including the Itala and the Vulgate, and fathers Greek and Latin, endorse this addition, and represent the virgins as going to meet the "Bridegroom and the bride." Of course, it is a mere gloss. Had a bride been named, it would have detracted from the perfect finish of the parable and brought in confusion, as Christians real or in name are meant by the ten who go forth to meet the Lord.

is not the expressed aim. When we talk about Christians, real or nominal, we do not fix our mind on unity; we think of individuals who go forth. Christ was about to present profession, and so introduces foolish as well as wise virgins. He therefore looks at Christians professing His name truly or falsely, not at the bride of the Lamb. The Christians are here characterised by quitting every object on earth to meet the Bridegroom. Even the Jew, attached as he was to the old religion (and they had a religion which could boast an antiquity before which all others grow pale), when become a Christian, leaves all to go forth unto Him, as we read in Hebrews xiii. 13, "bearing His reproach."

Here you have the same great principle. As the Christian, even though once a Jew, was called to leave the old order behind, so the virgins went forth to meet the Bridegroom. Five of them were wise, and five foolish. Those who were foolish took their torches but no oil with them; but the prudent took oil in their vessels with their torches.

Is it true that the Jewish remnant at the end of the age could have oil in their vessels? They will never have such an unction till the Lord Jesus comes and sheds the Spirit on them. For it is well known that oil symbolically means the power of the Holy Ghost. It is not merely the washing by the Spirit, however vital; for beyond doubt the Jewish remnant will have this. They will be really cleansed in the heart by the word. The Jewish disciples found at the end of the age do not receive the out-pouring of the Spirit till the Lord appears; they

wait for that day. It is only when the kingdom comes that the power of the Holy Spirit will be upon them. They will when converted welcome Him in their heart; saying, Blessed be He that cometh in Jehovah's name. They will go through a serious inward process next; as we are told, when they see the Lord Jesus, they mourn as for an only Son. They have a fountain opened in Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness; but the power of the Holy Ghost will be given only after they have seen the Lord. There is this difference with the Christian, that he receives the oil or unction from the Holy One while the Lord is unseen and on high. The Jewish remnant will only receive it when the Lord comes back.

Again, there is at no time in their case, what we see in these virgins, a class that goes forth to meet the Bridegroom. The Jewish disciples will not disappear from Jerusalem until the idol is set up and the tribulation is at hand. Then they flee from the enemy's power and its dread consequences from God. It is a flight from the overflowing scourge in retribution and judgment for the people's iniquity. It is no going forth to meet the Bridegroom in joyful hope as here.

The Christian has another course and hope altogether. Whether it be light or dark, the Christian goes forth to meet the Bridegroom. What is the original hope of the Christian? It is our object and calling revealed in, from, and for heaven. That object is Christ, the blessed One whose grace has been proved, and whose coming one awaits: hence he goes forth to meet the Bridegroom. Not so the

Jewish remnant; they expect to see the Lord coming to deliver them by the putting down of their enemies. As Christ ascended, so the Christian waits to be caught up out of the world; the Jewish saint waits for the Lord to come judicially into the world, which is no doubt our expectation also. The parable speaks solely of the Christian, and in no way refers to the Jewish remnant.

We shall see other proofs of this. It is said that the wise took oil in their vessels: the foolish took no oil. This meets another error. Not a few have supposed that the foolish virgins mean Christians who are not pre-millennarians. This gives a very undue value to correct notions of prophecy. Granted entirely that those who look for the Lord to come before that reign are right in their judgment. Those who put the millennium before the Lord's coming are quite mistaken. But how can one sympathise with those who put a slight upon such Christians as have not been taught as you and I? These are self-flattering delusions, and are empty manifestations that bear the brand of sect or school written on them. The best blessings we have are those which God confers on His children, on the body of Christ, in other words on all those in whom the Holy Ghost dwells, who rest on Christ and His redemption. These are the persons spoken of as wise. The Holy Ghost is a divine spring for sustaining testimony, as well as a divine power of understanding the word of God, and for communion with the Father and the Son.

The foolish virgins never had oil in their vessels.

Some ask how they can have had their torches burning. The answer is easy. They could light the torch: there is no mystery about that. The foolish virgins were not real Christians. The weakest Christian as well as the strongest has the oil. The apostle John so tells not the fathers, nor the young men, but the babes, the little children. He tells the feeblest that they have an unction from the Holy One. For those who had no oil could not be Christians, in any real, full, or divine sense of the name. Hence a greater evil is in question than thinking the millennium to be before Christ's second coming or after it. The heart was a stranger to the Lord's grace: a thing more momentous than right notions about the word of prophecy.

If you have Christ, if you know the blood of sprinkling, if you rest on a crucified and risen Saviour, you surely have the oil in your vessels. You are not one of the foolish virgins. Their folly consisted in a want very much deeper than in a right or wrong prophetic scheme. The foolish lived a life of religious levity, not of necessity hypocritical but of self-deception, ignoring God and His grace; and consequently, not having the Spirit of Christ, they were none of His. The foolish virgins have not the Holy Spirit dwelling in them; so the Lord means and deals with them.

We often think of the early Christians with their great advantages; we see that, many of the scriptures applying to them fully, we can only get the principle of them. But your attention is called here to the fact that there are other scriptures which

apply more emphatically to us now. There is thus what one may call a divine compensation. We can only take the general spirit of what was said to the Corinthians. For instance, they had tongues and other miraculous powers among them. It is plain that we have not ; and only a few enthusiasts pretend to have them. Alas ! wherever there are pretensions to sign gifts, their falsity or worse is soon found out.

The fact is that God, for the wisest reasons, has not been pleased to continue these miraculous powers. The present condition of the church would make it to be a moral impossibility that God should at present bestow these extraordinary virtues. For if the Lord were to restore them now, one might ask, Where ? Most people would begin with themselves. Were the Lord to confer these powers upon the various sects of Christendom, it would be putting His seal upon what His word says is wrong as if all were right. How could He thus contradict Himself ? How could He thus sanction the broken fragments of His house or put honour upon its fallen condition ? Without this we are ready to be self-satisfied ; we are too prone to think more highly of ourselves than we ought ; and the Lord will not help us to be more so.

But He has left what is infinitely better ; He continues everything due to Christ and good for the soul in every true want. He has taken away nothing needful for edification. He still gives peace and joy in believing. Now as of old He puts this inward power in the church ; but He marked it of old with a brilliant signature before the world. Those who look for

the restoration of these powers are not alive to what befits our fallen condition. It is morally most important for the Christian to know what the church was at first and what it is now, grieving before God at the difference. What sympathy ought there to be with the Christian who is not a mourner because of the state of the church? It is well to have joy in the Lord; but we should be humbled about ourselves and the church. Ought we not for the Lord's sake to feel deeply the actual condition of ruin?

In the parable, you will observe, the Lord points out the failure from the original calling. "While the bridegroom tarried, they all nodded and went asleep." What a state of departure, from forgetfulness of the Lord's return! It was a general and total insensibility to the hope. When sleepy, they haply turned in here or there to take repose. It was no longer true that they went forth to meet the Bridegroom. The wise who had the oil in their vessels slept like the foolish who had none.

But now mark another thing. It is midnight, and there was a cry made, "Behold, the bridegroom; go forth to meet him." Has this been fulfilled? In measure it has, or rather it is being fulfilled now. It is a cry made by divine grace. No sign appeared, no outward warning, no seeing of a prophecy accomplished, as for the Jewish remnant in chap. xxiv. In us God works invisibly by His word and Spirit. The Lord is interposing to break the long slumbering condition of Christendom, and this not only for the wise but for the foolish.

Have there not been times when men were im-

pressed with the fear that judgment-day was coming, when they yielded to sore panic at the cry that "the end of the world" was at hand? In the year 600 they were sure it would be then. But time passed on, and the end of the world did not come. They slumbered again. Then, in the year 1000 (surely 1000 was the fatal number!) there was yet greater alarm all over western Christendom; and the clergy took advantage of this, and got the barons and people to give their gold and their labour, lands and possessions, to build grand cathedrals and religious houses some of which, as is well-known, exist to the present day. This fear passed away, and the end of the world did not come. Then followed a long, a deep slumber indeed.

Further there have been partial awakenings at various times since, but they were of the same character. At the period of the great rebellion, when the Puritans got into power in England, there was a momentary shaking in this country; and bold men rose up, who tried to establish the Fifth Monarchy, or present power in the world in the name of the Lord Jesus. Movements such as this took place at various epochs; but where was the going forth to meet the Bridegroom? There was not even a resemblance to it.

In past ages then there was alarm, sometimes to the utmost degree; and this state is represented in the well known mediæval hymn or dirge, "Dies Irae," the extreme expression of Catholic terror. Such was the feeling of the middle ages. Since then, in later times, Protestant fanatics tried to get

power into their hands. But this means seizing the earth at the present, not quitting all to meet Christ.

The momentous fact is that two spiritual characteristics, very distinct from ancient or mediæval or modern views, mark off truth from error as to this. Are we not to be humbled because of the evil that has been done in Christendom? And are we not practically to take our stand on what was the Lord's will from the first? If the Lord at the outset called all Christians to go out to meet Him, they should ever cherish this as their calling and joy of heart. The consequence of a revival of the Christian hope of meeting the Lord is resumption of the original position, that of going forth to meet the Bridegroom. How could believers honestly continue in what they know to be false and unscriptural, if they look for the Lord to come back any day? Thus the practical effect is immediate and immense where heart and conscience are true to Him. Compare Luke xii. 35-37 for the proper posture morally.

Awe-stricken come the foolish virgins to the wise, saying, "Give us of your oil;" but this is beyond the Christian, and the wise bid them "Go, buy oil for yourselves." There is One who sells,* but freely, without money and without price: to buy even from an apostle is fatal. The cry was given to revive the hope, as it had the effect also of recalling to the original and only right attitude of the saints toward Christ. It was enough to sever the

* Which is farthest from the truth?—Chrysostom's notion that those who sell are the poor, the indirect occasion of good to such as walk in love; or Alford's, who deduces from it "a mean" enough argument for an appointed and paid ministry.

wise as alone ready to act accordingly. It was too late for the foolish: who but One could give what they wanted?

What is the meaning of all the recent agitation? People zealous for religious forms, who know not really of Christianity. It is the foolish virgins in quest of the oil, leaving no stone unturned to get what they have not, the one thing needful—taking every way except the right way. There is only one means of procuring the oil: solely can it be through Christ Himself, without money and without price. I remember the time when men bearing the name of the Lord's ministers spent their time in fishing, hunting, shooting, and dancing. Clergymen joined in worldly pleasures without shame. You rarely hear of such things now: the Oxford delusion has altered the form. The same sort of men now-a-days look very demure: they are in general busy everywhere about religion. Do you believe they are any better than the men who used to hunt and dance? They have great zeal; but is it according to knowledge? Is it Christ, or is it not what they call the church without Him? Form deceives most.

All the fashionable millinery or machinery in religion, does it change people's state or suppose real renewal? The decking of ecclesiastical buildings, the fantastical costumes of clergymen, the modern taste for church music, processions, and stations, simply show that the foolish virgins are at work. They are not in a fit state to meet the Lord, and fear it themselves. They are troubled with the rumour of they know not what. The consequence,

then, of this midnight cry is that a double activity is going on. For the Lord is awakening those who know Himself, and are wise by His grace, to go forth to meet the Bridegroom. The others, if indirectly, are none the less powerfully but in their own way affected by the cry and its effects, which rise not above nature and the earth.

Utterly ignorant of the grace of God, they are trying to make up by what is called "earnestness." They know not that they are far from God, yea, dead in trespasses and sins: their superstitious trust in baptismal regeneration blinds them. So they think, or hope, that being "earnest" they may somehow or other get right at last. What delusion can be more hopeless? If you ask them whether their sins are blotted out, and they are saved by grace, they count it presumption. They are as ignorant of the true power and privilege of redemption as the heathen or the Jew. They have no Spirit-taught certainty that the Son of man came down to save the lost. If there be such a thing as a present salvation, their occupation is evidently gone. Neither grace nor truth admits of all this religious self-importance, bustle, and vain show. As sinners, we need a Saviour, and a divine salvation; as saints, let us seek a calm but complete devotedness to the name, word, and work of the Lord Jesus. But man prefers his own works; and to win the world he finds that scenic representations of Christian facts or forms act most on the masses, and attract the light, sentimental, despairing, and even profane. Individuals in the midst of such histrionic religion may seek

with a certain measure of the gospel to win souls; yet they subject Christ Himself to the church. But the movement as a whole is just the activity of the foolish virgins, who have not the oil and in vain try to get it as best they can.

At length the Bridegroom comes, and "they that were ready went in to the marriage; and the door was shut."

Afterwards come the foolish virgins. Now they cry, but it is with horror and despair. Their religious energy is at length seen to be of the old man. In an agony they say, "Lord, Lord, open to us." But the Lord of peace, the Giver of life and glory, has only to tell them, "I know you not." Do not fancy that this is said to faulty believers. It is said of the foolish virgins who had no oil; of those who bore the name of the Lord, but had not the Spirit of Christ. Of and to them it was declared that the Lord knew them not. "Watch, therefore," says He, "for ye know neither the day nor the hour."

There is no authority for what follows ("wherein the Son of man cometh"). You have heard the names of Griesbach, Scholz, Lachmann, and Tischendorf; of Dean Alford, T. S. Green, Scrivener, Drs. Tregelles, Westcott and Hort in this country. It is no peculiar thought in the least; for all biblical critics worthy of the name agree in this omission as required by the best authorities. Copyists added the clause from chap. xxiv. 42 and bring in the sense of the coming Judge. But this is quite incongruous with what He here urges, which is the delight of meeting, yea, the going forth to meet, Him the

Bridegroom. Man as such, must be judged; all the guilty tribes mourn before the Son of man. But the calling and hope of the Christian is fraught with other and joyous expectations: and this, spite of their unfaithfulness during the night whilst He tarried, for *all* slumbered and slept.

The middle parable is a similitude of the kingdom of the heavens. There only is found an historic or dispensational view of the state of things among those professedly Christ's on earth while He is on high. There accordingly the constant expectation of those who took the place of entering into the interests of His love is treated, with the issue at the end for such as were "foolish" and had no share in the unction of the Spirit; for this alone could enable any to be "ready" for going in with Christ to the marriage. The "then" of the comparison (Matt. xxv. 1), when judgment is executed on the evil servant of chap. xxiv., carries us up to the foolish virgins shut out and disowned by Him as known to Him: a complete disproof of the strange notion that they could be saints. Indeed the theory, if it deserves such a name, that any member of Christ's body will be left behind when He comes to receive His own to Himself and translate them to the Father's house, is not only baseless as opposed to the clearest testimony of scripture, but quite unworthy of a spiritual mind. Think of Christ's body without an ear or an eye, a finger or a toe! The bride of the Lamb mutilated and deformed in glory!

But even worse is that extreme form of the speculation, which supposes persons possessed of

eternal life, the knowledge of and communion with the Father and the Son, yet condemned to be tormented in the flame of Hades during the thousand years' reign of Christ and the glorified saints. And why? Because they were not immersed as professing believers in the water of baptism, and were not intelligent enough to accept premillennialism! For who does not know that there are thousands of saints, neither premillennials nor immersed, yet far more intelligent, devoted, and spiritual than multitudes of such Anabaptists, even if they fully accept premillennialism? No, "they that are Christ's at His coming," not some who plume themselves on this or that external mark or of truth quite subordinate to what they have and love, will be raised to share the kingdom when He reigns and to be with Him before the kingdom and during it and after it, having His presence and love in a glory deeper and higher. The scheme that denies this revealed certainty as in John xvii. 24, Rom. v. 17, 1 Thess. iv. 17 (last clause), and Rev. xxii. 5, is not only anti-scriptural but repulsive, yea destructive of all sound judgment and of the best affections.

In the third parable (of the Talents) it is not the collective responsibility so strikingly depicted in the first, nor the heavenly hope separating from other objects and attaching to the Bridegroom's coming, but a kind of pendant on it. "For [it is] as [if] a man going abroad called his own bondmen and delivered to them his goods. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each

according to his several ability, and went his way. Straightway he that received the five talents proceeded, and traded with them, and made other five talents. Likewise also he [that received] the two, and he gained other two. But he that received the one went off, and dug in the earth, and hid the money of his lord. After a long time the lord of those bondmen cometh and settlcth account with them. And he that received the five talents came forward and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst to me five talents: behold, I gained five other talents [besides them]. His lord said to him, Well, good and faithful bondman, thou wast faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many: enter into the joy of thy lord. And he also that [received] the two talents said, Lord, two talents thou deliveredst to me: behold, I gained other two talents. His lord said to him, Well, good and faithful bondman, thou wast faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many: enter into the joy of thy lord. And he also that had received the one talent came forward and said, Lord, I knew thee, that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering whence thou didst not scatter; and being afraid I went off, and hid thy talent in the earth; behold, thou hast that which is thine. But his lord answering said to him, Wicked and slothful bondman, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather whence I scattered not. Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the bankers, and at my coming I should have got mine own with interest. Take away therefore the talent

from him, and give [it] to him that hath the ten talents. For to every one that hath shall be given, and he shall be in abundance; but from him that hath not, even what he hath shall be taken away [from him]. And cast out the useless bondman into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping, and the gnashing of teeth " (vers. 14-30).

Here it is the Lord working by diversity of gifts; and as He is sovereign, so confidence in Him is what severs the "good and faithful" bondmen from the wicked and slothful one, as it was in Matt. xxiv. a question of prudent or wise fidelity. Zeal according to that confidence was followed by blessing and fruit. Here we have marked variety, and individual responsibility in faith, in contrast with unbelief and blindness to grace. When we know Christ (and the unprofitable one professed this), it is profound wickedness, and none in general worse than such a nominal Christian. When confidence in Him is wanting, all is wrong, though this may be shewn in fear to use what He had given for profit. Had he truly known the Lord, he would have served Him gladly, especially as he had a gift of power; but he knew Him not from God, and was judged according to his distrust and the falsehood which unbelief readily yields to. Unbelief receives what flesh says, according to what the evil heart suggests when it listens to Satan's lie. And the Lord deals with the wicked man as his slander deserved. While such as work on in confidence of His grace enter into the joy of their Lord, those who would not in distrust of Him, shall be consigned to the outer darkness with all

its horrors and misery. Bliss with Christ is beyond rewards, though this too has its place of moment.

Here the Parable of the Ten Pounds (or, Minas) in Luke xix. 12-27 is also instructive. It is peculiar to his Gospel and given before the last visit to Jerusalem; whereas that of the Talents was when the visit was drawing to a close. In Luke there is the same gift entrusted to each of the servants, and their responsibility and right use in some was strongly in evidence, yet to have authority over so many cities is the reward in the Kingdom, not entrance into their Lord's joy. But how profound the mistake to set a place of outward honour above sharing the Lord's joy with Himself! The good and faithful will receive that also, both being in the Kingdom. There is responsibility in active service.

If the faithful and wise servant, contrasted with "that evil servant," set forth the general place in the house, faithful or the contrary, the parable of the Talents shows us those who trade with the goods of Christ, and that blessing in this work turns on confidence in Him and His grace.

THE GENTILE PORTION.

MATT. XXV. 31—46.

THIS is the third and concluding section of the Lord's prophetic word. No part of it has been less understood ; yet it is clearly defined, as distinct from the other two, by internal marks which ought to have carried conviction to every believer. But such has been the fate of scripture ; not that God's word fails in plainness of speech and certainty of meaning, but because it crosses man's will, who therefore seeks to interpret it according to his own thoughts. Every scripture is for us, and, being of God, is also profitable for man ; but it is not all about us. We can only learn surely from itself concerning whom it speaks.

1. We have had a Jewish remnant believing, but without the full privileges of Christians, as the Lord addressed those who then represented it down to the end of the age. Then He appears as the Son of man, and in that day delivers not only such, but all the elect of the nation, the "all Israel that shall be saved," immediately after unparalleled tribulation.

2. Then (without a vestige of allusion to Judæa, the city, the temple, or any association local or temporal) the discourse takes up what applies directly and exclusively to the Christian profession, sound and un-

sound, in the three intermediate parables which were therefore couched in terms of altogether general import. Here "the Son of man" disappears according to the overwhelming testimony of the best MSS, Vv., and early citations for xxv 13.

3. There remained accordingly only to tell and hear of the Gentiles. For every reader or enquirer is aware that the mass of mankind, devoted to idols and impostures, has to this day resisted the Christian testimony. But the Lord had given in the first part (xxiv. 14) the remarkable intimation that "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the habitable world* for a witness to all the nations, and then shall the end come." Here He lets us know the fruit of this preaching, of course (if we are caught up) by the believing Jews of that day, as its place intimates, just before the end comes.

Hence the last section has its suited peculiarity which differentiates it from both the preceding ones, that pertaining to it alone and characteristically. For the specific ground for the King's decision turns on a preaching of the glad news of the kingdom which only came through His brethren (evidently converted Jews) before "the end," and is here shown to result among all the nations in some heeding the message and in others despising it. It is therefore unique in its circumstances as a whole;

* Even those who try to limit "the inhabited world" to the Roman Empire are obliged here to abandon it; for they admit that at this very time the Beast and the False Prophet will have banished it thence. We can understand the term employed by the Romans in pride of power, and so cited in scripture as in profane historians, and loosely used by the speakers in Acts xvii. 6, xxiv. 5. But it is not possible so to confine it in Acts xvii. 31, Rom. x. 18, Heb. i. 6, Rev. iii. 10, xvi. 14, any more than in Matt. xxiv. 14. Compare also Matt. iv. 8 with Luke iv. 5.

though no principle is involved which cannot be justified from other scriptures.

“ But when the Son of man shall have come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit down upon his throne of glory, and all the nations shall be gathered before him; and he shall separate them from one another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats (or, kids); and he will set the sheep on his right but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say to those on his right, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the world's foundation. For I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungering, and fed thee; or thirsty, and gave thee drink? and when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in; or naked, and clothed thee? and when saw we thee sick or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King answering shall say to them, Verily I say to you, Inasmuch as ye did [it] to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did [it] to me. Then shall he say also to those on the left, Go from me, accursed, into the everlasting fire that is prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and ye gave me not to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me not to drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also

answer, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and ministered not to thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say to you, Inasmuch as ye did [it] not to one of these least, ye did [it] not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life everlasting" (xxv. 31-46).

The Son of man will have already come. His war-judgments are over, as it seems, not only what He executed by the appearing of His presence (2 Thess. ii. 8), but when He put Himself at the head of His people, as in Isa. lxiii., Ezek. xxxviii. xxxix., Micah vi. and Zech. xiv. Now the "King" (found here only) enters on the sessional judgment of His throne, before which all the nations must appear; for then all the peoples, nations, and languages must serve Him. It is part of that judgment of the quick and of the habitable earth by the risen Man whom God appointed, as the apostle proclaimed to the Athenians. The judgment of living man on the earth, in the midst of his busy and selfish (not to say, sordid and sinful) life was much pressed by the Lord and the apostles, as it is largely in O. and N. T. prophecy; but it has been lost to the living faith even of saints in Christendom, alike nationalists and nonconformists. Yet even the creeds confess it, however little it was realised when they were written, and even increasingly less since. As the Jews let slip the judgment of the dead, save to hurl it at the head of the Gentiles; so Christendom practically forgets the judgment of the quick.

Here we have it applied by the Son of man judiciously when He enters on the exercise of His world-kingdom. Hence it is a question of men at large, not Jews, and of course not Christians (both of whom we have already had), but of "all the nations," when the Lord is come and sits down on the throne of His glory, as here.

It is the fullest and plainest contrast with "the judgment before the great white throne"; for then the earth and the heaven flee from His gaze, and no place is found for them. And "*the dead*," the great and the small, stand before the throne. There "the dead" (none else are spoken of) are judged according to their works out of the record of all done in the body, the book of life sealing it by its silence. This is not the coming of the Son of man to reign over the earth (as in Matthew); for the nations are destroyed, and the earth fled, and even the heavens. Our Gospel on the contrary shows the Son of man come to the earth, and all the nations gathered before Him. Here they are all living, to whom alone "nations" could apply; there not dead only, but the wicked dead alone, for the righteous dead had been raised long before for the first resurrection, the righteous thence not dying.

With all the nations then alive agrees the character of the test applied. There is no such scrutiny as Rom. ii. speaks of for the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by our Lord Jesus, as before the great white throne. Then it will be that as many as sinned without law shall also perish without law; and as many as sinned under law

shall be judged by law ; and still more terrible will be the doom of those that rejected the gospel or even neglected so great salvation, as other scriptures declare. But here it is a simple and sole issue, which applies only to that living generation of all the nations : how did you treat the King's messengers when they preached this gospel of the kingdom before the end came ? The end was now evidently come. The test was an open undeniable fact ; but it proved whether they had, or had not, faith in the coming King. Those who honoured the heralds of the kingdom showed their faith by their works ; and so did those who despised them manifest their unbelief. The test was not only just but gracious. And "the King" pronounced accordingly. The form was new, as the circumstances were ; but the foundation is the same for all the objects of God's mercy on the one hand, and for the objects of wrath on the other. So it was before the deluge, so it will be when the Son of man on His throne of glory on earth shall deal with all the nations. Apart from faith it is impossible to be acceptable ; for he that approaches God must believe that He is, and becomes a rewarder of those that seek Him out.

So it will be with the blessed of these nations. Their conduct to those who preached the coming kingdom evinced their faith, and the King's grace accepted to their astonishment what they did to His brethren, even the least, as done to Himself. The trials and sufferings of these "brethren" gave the Gentiles occasion to faith working by love, or to the total absence of it. It was so that Rahab the harlot

was justified by works when she received the messengers; but her faith is as carefully stated by the apostle Paul: without faith indeed her works would have been evil. But she rightly judged that Jehovah and His people were above king and country; and this was a turning point for her not then only but to eternity. So it was with the sheep; and the sad reverse was no less true for the goats.

There is another element overlooked by those who confound Matt. xxv. 31-46 with Rev. xx. 11-15. In the judgment of the dead but one class is stated, the dead who were not in the resurrection of the just. Hence only the unjust appear; and they are judged according to their works in all their life. Here appear not only the sheep and the goats, but the King's brethren, a third and highly honoured class; none of them dead or risen, but all alive. Can there be conceived a more striking contrast? The traditional view is nothing but ignorant though unwitting contempt of this scripture, which many Christians do not really believe in simplicity, and therefore cannot understand. The resurrection state must exclude what we find herein. With the judgment of the quick, and in particular of "all the nations," all here is harmonious. At the end "of the age" He comes; at the end "of the world" He does not. There is then no world to come to. It is all gone, to appear afterwards made new for eternity.

The decision is final, which led many to gloss over the marked distinctions, and mix it up with the close of Rev. xx. which is final too. But the one was at the beginning of the thousand years' reign,

and the other at its end, when there could be no coming of the Lord to surprise the careless world, as He Himself teaches, but earth and heaven had fled away. To interpret the two (yea, and the three!) as the same is in effect to lose each, if not all, of these grand and solemn revelations.

Let it be observed that the righteous, though they had faith in the kingdom and therefore treated its preachers as became the truth, were evidently little instructed. For we see how little their intelligence rose above that of their unbelieving countrymen. But their heart was right by grace, as the King knew perfectly, who from the first separated these to the right and the others to the left. He allowed this ignorance to come out that He might give to all a profound lesson never to be forgotten. This is quite compatible with the righteous as they were alive in their natural bodies. But is such lack of intelligence consistent with the risen condition? When that which is perfect is come (and it surely comes at the resurrection of the just), that which is in part shall be done away. This was not at all the state as yet of these sheep, the righteous Gentiles; and the King only communicates to them before His throne what every Christian may be assumed now to know, with a vast deal more quite beyond them. Yet was the kingdom prepared for these, as for the righteous generally, from the world's foundation.

Notice also that the everlasting fire to which the unbelieving Gentiles of that epoch are consigned is said to have been "*prepared* for the devil and his

angels," not for the goats, save that they fitted themselves for it by their evil ways. Compare also Rom. ix. 22. The devil and his angels were not yet cast into the lake of fire. This will only be after Satan's last effort at the end of the millennium, as Rev. xx. 10 tells us. But here the goats have now their portion, as the Beast and the False Prophet had a little before them, as we read in Rev. xix. 20, and that while alive too.

Premillennialists like Alford, Birks, and almost all, are nearly as confused as the postmillennialists. The cause is evident: the ancient and general error which connects the scrutiny of "all the nations" in our chapter with the judgment of "the dead" in Rev. xx. 11, &c. Resurrection is not nor could be predicated of "the nations" in the one; whereas it is the positive and essential statement in the other. When they are jumbled, dimness reigns, and alas! irreparably for distinctness and power of truth.

It must be borne in mind that stupendous facts had just taken place before all the nations are gathered here; facts ignored by most, yet all-important for understanding the position. The vast hosts of the west will have been destroyed from above at a stroke when the Beast and the False Prophet meet their doom. Soon after the eastern hordes led by the Assyrian of the prophets (Daniel's king of the north) will have been dissipated like the chaff. Edom will have met its final judgment (Isa. lxiii.); and so will Gog with his numerous allies (Ezek. xxxviii. xxxix.). The Jews, and Christendom, will have been already judged, as we see in this discourse. Hence "all the

nations" here summoned are composed of what remains after these executions of judgment; and, from the nature of the case, they must needs be exclusively living men who were quite lately placed under the responsibility of having heard "this gospel of the kingdom" preached by God-fearing Jews, whom the Lord will have sent for the express purpose before the end come.

This alone explains the peculiar criterion by which "the righteous" were marked off from their unbelieving fellows. It was His grace that blessed those who received these glad tidings; and now they hear of their blessed portion from the lips of the King. They were as amazed to learn His estimate of their faith working by love, as the hardened in their incredulity were to meet their awful end. We have no ground to believe that either the sheep or the goats ever heard the full gospel of God such as was preached by the Christian witnesses, any more than that the converted Jews themselves knew it as we do. We must leave room for the sovereign ways of God, dealing variously in His wisdom with the future quite as much as with the past. But for every sinful soul there must be faith for life eternal; and faith is from a report, and the report through God's word. Thus only can any fallen man be brought into living relation with Him. The measure has differed greatly at different times, as it will; but the principle is the same. This of course applies only to those who hear.

We may further and particularly note that there is not the least allusion to the resurrection here for

either "the righteous" or "the accursed." On both sides they were Gentiles living in their natural bodies; for they are expressly said to be "all the nations" when they were gathered before the glorious throne of the Son of man. It is not, as in Rev. xx. 11-15, impenitent sinners of every age and nation, and of mankind before there was a nation as in the ante-diluvian world. These had all died, and are at last raised at the resurrection of the unjust, to be judged each according to his works. In Matt. xxv. 31, &c., all the Gentiles there find their doom decided by the way they treated the King's brethren, the messengers of "this gospel of the kingdom."

He had said that it should go forth "in all the habitable world for a witness to all the nations." And now comes out the solemn issue. Some had shewn, not merely benevolence, or self denial, or moral excellence in any marked degree, but love in varied ways to the servants who preached in the King's name the same truth which He had preached at the beginning of His public ministry. But it was faith which wrought in their love. If the King and His coming kingdom had been but a myth in their eyes, they would have at least ignored His messengers as impostors. They believed the message, contrary to all appearances, to be of God, and therefore treated its preachers with kindness; and are to enjoy the gracious result. Ancients and moderns lower, deprave, and destroy the true force of Christ's words by taking it as kindness to "the poor." Thus Chrysostom, for instance, one of the best of the Fathers, makes this lack of giving to the poor

to be the fatal evil, even in the parables which set forth Christendom, of course with more appearance there, but everywhere wrong. It was not good done even to the sheep, but specifically to "My brethren," even the least of them.

So the King puts the difference of the two classes on the only right ground that could apply to "all the nations" then before His throne, after such a preaching as had by grace reached them before the end. Now it had come: the new age was begun. The King had done what none else could; for He separated them all, and, as it is evident, individually with unfailing discernment. Instead of their giving account to Him, He recounts to them why He set some on His right and some on the left. The ground for it He lays down with a majesty and a touching yet righteous character, appropriate and peculiar to Himself, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Yet it turned on faith that it might be according to grace, or alas! on unbelief where no grace was but only self. Hence He said to the wondering righteous, "Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these my brethren [whatever the living work to His despised and suffering messengers], ye did it to me." How awful on the other hand for the unjust to hear, in answer to their more hurried summary, "Inasmuch as ye did [it] not to one of these least, neither did ye [it] to me." Yet was it altogether righteous.

Thus all at bottom rests on Christ, though His grace makes the most of what to others might seem trivial. But the point is lost when the special cir-

cumstances of these Gentiles is ignored, and men generalise, oblivious of the principle. Take Alford's note on "my brethren" as a sample (and he is far from the least intelligent): "Not necessarily the saints with Him in glory—though primarily those—but also any of the great family of man (!). Many of those here judged may never have had opportunity of doing these things to the saints of Christ properly so called (!!).” Yet here God took care that the preaching did reach them; and that the circumstances of its messengers should give opportunity to all the Gentiles here gathered for this manifestation of faith and love, or also of total indifference, to say the least. The faith working by love in the one class, and the utter unconcern of the other, laid bare respectively their fitness or unfitness for inheriting the kingdom. In all cases of saints, works are the evidence, faith of the word the instrument, Christ's work the ground, and God's grace the source.

It is well also to observe that the King does not call them adopted sons, as is the portion of Christians (Gal. iii. 26), nor do they exhibit the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which is characteristic of such, any more than either can be predicated of the O. T. saints. He calls them "blessed" of *His* Father, but does not add of "yours"; for this was not their privilege to know as it is ours. Nor does He speak of the blessings according to God's counsels for us in the heavenlies, to which He chose us in Christ *before* the world's foundation. Even Bengel like others before and since made this strange confusion. The King bade them inherit the king-

dom prepared for them *from* the world's foundation. They are elect and born of God, as all saints must be; but they do not reign with Christ in that day, any more than even "His brethren" among the Jews who survived this last crisis before the kingdom; whereas such as had been at that "time of the end" slain for His name will be raised to reign with Him as shewn in Rev. xx. 4. But those saved of Gentiles like the saved of Israel will have a distinctive place of honour over those born during the millennial reign, as we may gather from Rev. vii. and xiv. As elect Jews will have known "flesh saved" from the tribulation which is to befall the rebellious people, so elect Gentiles emerge out of "the great tribulation" in their own quarters: contra-distinguished from the church, whom the Lord declares He will keep out of the hour of trial that is about to come on the whole habitable world to try those that dwell on the earth.

If there were the slightest value in "universal consent," it would be hard to find a clearer sample than in the traditional interpretation of the sheep and the goats gathered before the King. Is there a single commentator of note who does not educe from it what they call "the greatest judgment of all mankind" at the end of the world? The postmillennialists are at least more consistent than most premillennialists; because the former are entirely in error, whereas the latter know enough truth to make their system incoherent and themselves without excuse. Let us seek to realise what the hypothesis means. If the terms admitted of all the dead being

then raised from the grave, how do the criteria apply to the ante-diluvians? Had they the opportunity of receiving the King's brethren in their varied trials, or of neglecting them to His dishonour?

No such mission of old can be sustained for a moment. Noah alone preached to warn in his day of coming ruin through the deluge; but it was only to that generation, and not at all "this gospel of the Kingdom." Again, how or where were His brethren? And how can it be shewn in "the world that now is" since the deluge? In due time Jehovah gave Israel His law; but this was as far as possible from "this gospel of the kingdom." Where comes in at that time the preaching of "this gospel?" Now the law and the prophets were till John, who first preached that the kingdom had drawn nigh, because Messiah the King was there. And so the Lord preached, and the Twelve. But His rejection interrupted this, and the cross postponed it, giving meanwhile a new and mysterious form to it during His absence on high (Matt. xiii.) till Israel's heart turn to the Lord, saying, Blessed be He that cometh in Jehovah's name. A righteous remnant takes up the word before the end comes, whom the Lord will convert and send forth, and preaches it as a testimony to all the nations, before the Son of man appears to establish it in power.

During the many years that precede this extraordinary mission to all the habitable world, the ground of statement as stated in Rom. ii. 12 is for mankind generally wholly different. For there is no respect of persons with God, who will then

judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, which can scarce apply to this scene. Hence, while there is a resurrection of life for such as (hearing the word of Jesus and believing God that sent Him) have life, eternal life, there will be at length also a resurrection of judgment for those who, believing not, produced only evil works. This is the judgment in Rev. xx. 11., &c., where all had been dead but raised, and judged according to their works, and are therefore lost. But it is an evident and total contrast with the King's decision about the living Gentiles; to whom His brethren (the converted of the Jews) are to preach before the end, and proved righteous or reprobate as they behaved to the bearers of "this gospel of the kingdom." Clearly the test here employed by the King suits only the living Gentiles who had treated well or ill His brethren with whom they are confronted, because of their faith or unbelief in the King who pronounces on both. The character is peculiar and necessarily determined by the brief mission of "this gospel of the kingdom" before the end. It was in no sense the end of the *world* (κόσμου), but of the *age* (αἰῶνος), when the King had not yet come to reign over the earth. This appraisal of all the Gentiles is when He shall have come in His glory, and shall sit on His throne. It will thus be plain that Rev. xx. in the two resurrections exactly agrees with the Lord's discourse in John v. 21-29; whilst Matt. xxv. 31-46, though equally true, widely differs from both.

We may see an interesting link between Matt. xxiv. 14 and Matt. xxv. 40, 45. "His brethren"

were those who at the time of the end carried "this gospel of the kingdom" to all the nations, which are blessed or cursed by the King's decree according to their behaviour toward those who thus and then brought the word of God. It was not brethren of the intervening Christian character, but of the converted Jews to the Gentiles. And as these brethren are thus honoured by the King, so are the Gentiles blessed who received and entreated them well, the Son of man being come and reigning over both. It is the age to come, not the judgment of the dead; and the ground on which the solemn decision depended fits into no time or circumstances of the Gentiles, save the eventful mission by a future remnant of godly Jews who preach the gospel of the kingdom just before the Son of man comes to enforce and establish it.

It is well to take note that the appraisal of "all the nations" takes place, not only after the rapture of the heavenly saints, but, after the dealing with Israel in Matt. xxiv. It is when the Son of man shall have come in His glory and is exercising His Kingly authority over the earth: a wholly different state of things from the white throne which ushers in the new heavens and new earth for eternity, when He shall deliver up the kingdom to God.

Thus we have here a deeply interesting and momentous judgment which the Lord is to execute over all the nations who only hear "this gospel of the kingdom" before the end comes, and He returns to bring in His kingdom. Applied as it is by

the theologians ancient and modern, Catholic or Protestant, it enfeebles and darkens what scripture declares of the judgment before the great White Throne in Rev. xx. And its own true application is effaced. A gap is thus created in the revelation of God, which no other in scripture can fill ; whilst the attempt to fit it into the last judgment after the millennium is over, and the subsequent destruction of the insurgent rebels, causes nothing but confusion. Give this judgment its place at the beginning of the millennium ; a fresh light shines without obstruction.

THE FUTURE TRIBULATION.

It is as clear to the Christian that he is to expect suffering, scorn, injury, persecution, and in short tribulation of every sort in and from the world, as that grace has given him the richest privileges in Christ. "These things I have spoken to you," says our Lord, "that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye have (not merely "ye shall have," as in inferior witnesses) tribulation; but be of good courage: I have overcome the world" (John xvi. 33). Also in Acts xiv. 22, for establishing the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to abide in the faith, the word is that "through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God." So the great apostle could say on the one hand, "I ask that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory" (Eph. iii. 13), and, on the other, "to you it was granted in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him but also to suffer for his sake, having the same conflict which ye saw in me and now hear of in me" (Phil. i. 29, 30). "Faithful the word [is]; for if we died with [him], we shall also live together; if we endure, we shall also reign together" (2 Tim. ii. 11, 12). We may not all be

called to suffer *for* Him, but if we suffer not *with* Him, can we look to be glorified together? Rom. viii. 17. It is here that we differ essentially from the saints born in the millennial age, who therefore are reigned over, instead of reigning with Christ.

But it is quite another question, Who are the saints that pass through and come out of the great tribulation? The answer cannot be given by human feeling, nor by good men undertaking to prophesy, but by the light God has given us in the prophetic word. Vehement accusation of wresting the scriptures, of claims to infallibility, of a self-elected minority who are too privileged to be subjects of persecution, of the madness of exaggerated self-conceit, nay even of "seducing spirits," only betrays extreme party spirit, and ignorance of the true enquiry, "What saith the scripture?"

The answer is plain not only on the positive side, but even on the negative.

First, and chiefly, the O.T. is explicit that "at the time of the end," when "Michael shall stand up, the great prince who standeth for the children of thy people," "there shall be a time of trouble (or, tribulation) such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time." It will far exceed even what accompanied the idolatrous effort of Antiochus Epiphanes, of which Dan. xi. 31, 32 speaks. We do hear of an "abomination that maketh desolate" then set up, but not of the tribulation without parallel which Dan. xii. predicts for the end, when the abomination that maketh desolate will be set up again and for the last time. Here it

is incontestable that we hear only of Daniel's people, the Jews, who "at that time shall be delivered, everyone that shall be found written in the book," that is, the future elect and godly remnant.*

It is no less indisputable that our Lord refers (Matt. xxiv.) to this abomination standing in a holy place *for those in Judæa* to flee to the mountains, and to the great trouble that is to follow, in even stronger terms than Daniel was given to employ. The context is just as plain and certain as that of the prophet of the captivity, that He too contemplates Jewish disciples, at that time, whom He will deliver by appearing in glory as the Son of man to the discomfiture of their enemies, but also to the discriminating judgment of Israel. For the elect, not merely of the Jews (22) but of His entire people Israel (31), shall be gathered together from the four winds (where are still scattered these of the ten tribes undiscerned), from one end of the heavens to the other. The Lord addresses His disciples here in a personal way, which does not apply to the intermediate part, still less to what He tells us of "all the nations" in Matt. xxv. 31-46.

The same fact is no less observable in Mark xiii. which gives in substance the first section of our Lord's prophecy as in Matthew's Gospel, but with those characteristic additions of his on the service of His name. See vers. 9-12, and 34. But there

*Nor is it to my mind doubtful that in Dan. xii. 2 the like figure is employed, as in Isa. xvi. 14-20, Ezek. xxxvii. 1-14, Hos. vi. 1, 2, xiii. 14, to describe the resuscitation of the nation, not the Jews proper already so deeply tried, but Israel dead as it were among the nations, who will then awake, some for life everlasting, others to everlasting contempt. As this however may be contested, I merely notice the matter in this brief note.

is no difference in the relevant intimation that in the future crisis only "those in Judæa" are concerned, and that it is a question here of "flesh" being saved, and of "this generation," etc., not of resurrection and rapture on high. Jewish disciples only are in question, and deliverance coming down to the earth in displayed power and glory, instead of saints caught up by the Lord and to be with Him as in 1 Thess. iv.

But in Luke xxi. 20-24 there is, what we have in neither Matthew nor Mark (tradition notwithstanding), an explicit prediction of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, and great distress upon the land and upon this people. Their being led captive into all the nations only he mentions, as also the remarkable and still continued sentence of Jerusalem to be trodden down by Gentiles until their assigned times be fulfilled. He speaks of "days of vengeance," as indeed such they were then; and he leaves room for more at the close where in fact he speaks of distress of nations, and men fainting for fear. This is quite in character with the design of the third Gospel, which entirely omits the abomination of desolation and the unequalled tribulation, so prominent in the two preceding Gospels. Those who have (and they are legion from ancients to moderns) attempted to identify his special part with theirs destroy their true bearing. It is from ver. 25 that Luke coalesces with his predecessors in what evidently belongs to the time of the end. Verses 20-24 are special to him.

Secondly, Rev. vii. 9-17 presents the vision of a

great crowd which none could number (distinguished from the 144,000 sealed out of the twelve tribes of Israel), as it was out of every nation, and of tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They have a wholly different position from the crowned and enthroned elders and the four living creatures; so much so that one of the elders explains to the prophet who they are, and whence they came. "And he said to me, These are they that come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Here then we have clear evidence that grace will deliver a vast crowd of believing Gentiles out of "the great tribulation" at the time of the end. The traditional notion that it figures the church is refuted by the very phrase which limits these to Gentiles saved out of that great tribulation which is to come. They are therefore, as a special gathering out at the close, quite distinct from those heavenly saints of all times symbolised in the same scene. It would seem that the extreme severity of the future tribulation will fall in and round Jerusalem, for the Lord declares it unparalleled; but there is no reason to doubt that it then awaits all nations, if in lesser measure. It is "*the* great tribulation," perhaps implied in Luke's description of "distress of nations" at that very time. There are Gentile saints, as well as Jews, to emerge from it in that day, not forming one body as now in the church, but expressly distinct from it and from one another, as Rev. vii. itself plainly attests.

Thirdly, there is the promise, most appropriate to the overcomers of the church in Philadelphia (Rev. iii. 10), though surely not for them exclusively, "Because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep thee (not during, but) out of the hour of trial that is about to come upon the whole habitable earth, to try those that dwell upon the earth." That hour may include more than "the great tribulation"; but one knows no intelligent Christian who thinks it covers less. The faithful, the Christian saints, are here then promised to be kept out of that hour. Any geographical refuge, as was taught by B. W. N. and others, is vain; for it will befall the whole habitable world. The heavenly saints (1 Cor. xv. 43) will be caught up before that crisis comes, which is retributive for the lawlessness of the Jews and the Gentiles—a wholly different kind of trouble from what is our portion as Christians.

Thus it is plain and sure that, if we are subject to scripture, no evidence appears that the church, the Christian body, passes through the great coming tribulation before this age ends. The proof-texts apply expressly and exclusively to Jews and Gentiles, with the striking exemption from that hour of those who keep the patience of Christ. This, though pledged to the Philadelphian overcomers, no saint of sound judgment would limit to such, any more than other words of comfort similarly vouchsafed to the various seven churches.

But this is not all. With that lack of spiritual discernment, which is now and has been for ages characteristic of Christendom, the absurd error pre-

vails, even among many earnest students of prophecy, that because all scripture is *for* us, our edification and use, it is therefore *about* us. Any serious consideration must assuredly shatter such an assumption. Is it then left to uncertainty or guesswork? In no way. Nor is time the great interpreter, or history, as sages have said. Not so, but as for all scripture, so for its prophetic part, it is the Holy Spirit. Inasmuch as He inspired to write it, so does He give understanding of God's mind in it to those who wait in dependence on the Lord for it, and thus weigh well not only the text but the context, and other scriptures converging on the same point.

Those, however, who hastily take for granted that the future tribulation must be shared by the members of Christ, have gone farther astray in their zeal, and yield to random invective and rash abuse. This we may leave, and seek to help them in and by the truth, as we give heed to all they argue.

Is it said "that it is from a blend of impatience and cowardice" people look for saints to be caught up before the last tribulation? Also, "that it is by this very persecution that ALL saints in all places shall be brought to be made simultaneously ready for the Lord at His appearing?" Such thoughts, if we prefer silence on their spirit, betray a total want of divinely given intelligence. Suffering for righteousness' sake, and yet more for Christ's name, is a high privilege; and God has given it in the fullest measure to the members of Christ, though in spirit to all saints from the beginning. Our Lord was here as in all else supreme; and as He said, The disciple is not

above his Master, but every one perfected shall be as his Master. Yea, rejoins the great apostle, and all that will live piously in Christ Jesus shall be persecuted. Hence the faithful, not of the world as Christ is not, should be prepared for it beyond all throughout their pilgrimage.

But the future tribulation has a quite different source and character. In its most terrible form it will be a penal infliction of God on the consummation of Jewish apostasy, when the abomination of desolation is set up in the holy place. Those who rejected and by hand of lawless men crucified their own Messiah, the Son of God, will worship the Antichrist in the temple of God, showing that he himself is God. If without parallel for severity of judicial woe, it is because of his unparalleled audacity of lawlessness, and Satan's power in the Beast of the west joining the False Prophet of the east in contempt of Jehovah and His Christ. What has this specific crisis to do with our being granted to suffer for Christ's sake?

Indeed the Lord Jesus (instead of calling on the godly Jews to stay and suffer when God is thus visiting His guilty people, not only for their final apostasy but at last bowing down to the man of sin as the true God in His house) bids the godly remnant flee forthwith, regardless even of clothes or any thing else, to save their lives. So in the minor case of the days of vengeance that befell Jerusalem, when the murderers were destroyed and their city burnt, it was no question of suffering as a privilege, but of a retributive dealing of God; and the Lord therefore

directed those that heeded His words to escape when they saw Jerusalem compassed with armies. Was this "a blend of impatience and cowardice"? Shame on the false system, which thus misleads saints to slight Christ and ignore God's word.

Undoubtedly it will be a short time of unexampled trial. And we know too that there will be martyrdom once more, and a later group answering to a former one, as Rev. xx. 4 concisely assures us. Those who died for rejecting the Beast, like the earlier faithful (cf. Rev. vi. 9-11), shall rise in the blessed resurrection and reign with Christ; as those whose life was spared shall enjoy the kingdom under Christ. Daniel (vii. 18, 27) had already pointed out the distinction of the saints of the high places (or, the heavenlies) from "the people" of those saints: the one receiving the kingdom in an absolute way, and possessing the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever; the other having simply the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdom "under the whole heaven" given to them. They both consist of the godly Jews, with converted Gentiles also, at the time of the end; but there is no union in one body like the church, which at this time, the completion of the age, is only seen symbolically, and on high, as the book of Revelation teaches.

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